

GIFTED STUDENTS:

Who Are They?



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For the South Carolina Department of Education
Inez Moore Tenenbaum, State Superintendent of Education
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Preparation Checklist

Before the Staff Development Program ...

- ☐ Read through all materials, particularly the directions and notes for each part, before the scheduled staff development.
- ☐ Make copies of handouts.
- ☐ Make overhead transparencies or PowerPoint slides.
- ☐ Have the necessary projection equipment available at site (overhead projector if using transparencies, LCD panel or projection equipment if using PowerPoint slides, and TV and VCR for the videotape). Test the working condition of the equipment.
- ☐ Arrange seating so that participants can view presentation visuals and videotape and work with partners during the activity.

Presentation Outline

(Suggested Allocation of Time)

- | | |
|--|-----------|
| I. Introduction, including rationale and outline | (5 min.) |
| II. Activity | (15 min.) |
| III. Characteristics, with discussion | (15 min.) |
| IV. Videotape, with questions | (15 min.) |
| V. Debriefing on activity | (10 min.) |

Presentation Script

I. Introduction

Overhead #1

Introduce yourself and provide any pertinent information about yourself and the staff development session.

Present the participants with a rationale for the staff development. Here is an example:

Overhead #2

We will spend the next hour acquainting you with characteristics of academically gifted and talented students so that you can recommend students in your classroom who should be screened for the gifted and talented program. By recognizing and understanding these characteristics in your students, you will also be better able to meet their particular needs in your classroom. The regulation governing gifted and talented programs in South Carolina—*Regulation 43-220*—requires that teachers and staff be provided with training about the characteristics of academic giftedness.

II. Activity

Handouts - Case Studies

Each participant should receive a copy of the case studies (two pages). Have teachers pair up to read and discuss the five cases and rate each one according to the directions on the first page. Partners are to discuss until they agree on the rating. Allow approximately 15 minutes for this activity.

To begin our exploration of the characteristics of gifted and talented students, you will examine five case studies. Working with a partner, read and discuss each case study. Then agree on a rating for the individual who is profiled in the case study. You will have 15 minutes for this activity.

Explain to participants that you will come back to this activity, and their answers, at the end of the staff development session.

III. Characteristics

Using the overheads, review each characteristic and possible classroom behaviors. All of the characteristics are research-based, appearing on nearly every list in any text on the gifted and talented. Remember this is an awareness session for your participants. Don't get bogged down in excessive detail.

Point out to the participants that their handouts include all of the information contained on the overheads. They should not spend time taking extensive notes!

Overhead #3

1. This is the most obvious characteristic and the one most of us think of when we consider the concepts of gifted and talented. Unfortunately what often happens in the classroom is that gifted and talented students are either wasting their time repeating content they already know or they are given twice as much work as everyone else just to keep them busy. Instead they should be challenged with assignments at the appropriate pace, depth, and complexity.
2. Again, this is an easily recognized characteristic. Several cautions are in order. First, a student may use his/her verbalism to avoid difficult thinking tasks—e.g., the student may be glib in talking his/her way out of situations. Secondly, teachers and other adults need to understand that the verbal ability may be oral or written. Furthermore, it may be in non-standard English. Use of non-standard English does not indicate a lack of potential giftedness. It merely indicates that the student's primary exposure to language has been non-standard English.
3. This characteristic can cause problems for the student. Teachers and parents often believe if a student is gifted, he/she should be gifted in everything. Expectations based on this belief create an unnecessary burden for the student.

Overhead

4. *(As you discuss this one, teachers often experience an “aha.”)*
- Let's look at arithmetic computation. When gifted and talented students have mastered computation skills, they can't understand why they must review and practice so much. They know they can do it. It is no challenge. They get bored and make mistakes or put any answer down. This is why arithmetic computation and total math are not good subscores for identifying these students. Math concepts and applications are better indicators.
 - Poor spelling skill does not indicate a lack of academic giftedness. Pair poor spellers with good spellers for editing tasks. Teach students patterns of spelling words.
 - Sometimes teachers ask about having students work to improve their handwriting. To change poor handwriting will take valuable time that could be spent learning new concepts and skills. Allow students with illegible handwriting to use the computer for written work.
5. This characteristic has an up side, as well as a down side. The positive result is an early ability to delay closure. This means the student is flexible, open to change, and unwilling to end a task or project prematurely. On the negative side, the student can become easily frustrated with demands for deadlines. Notice that “when interested” is underlined. This can work for teachers if they capitalize on student interest; however, it may work against both the student and the teacher if the student simply refuses to do the work because she/he isn't interested.

6. This reasoning ability may emerge early in the student's development—meaning that the student questions parents, as well as other adults. The frustration occurs because the logic of the student's position is crystal clear to her/him, but others don't "see" it.
7. Varied interests may send the student off in many directions, compromising his/her focus and overextending the energy level. Curiosity may take the student off on tangents unrelated to the assigned task or project.
8. Although we give lip service to creativity, in fact, it is not often rewarded in schools. The creative student seems to be going "up the down staircase" most of the time and doesn't mind being a minority of one. Creative students chafe under rigid conformity.

Point out that the first eight characteristics have been cognitive in nature. The next characteristic—sense of humor—is both cognitive and affective.

9. This characteristic is an excellent way to identify a gifted and talented student. He/she usually possesses a more sophisticated sense of humor than the same age peers do. This student will often see the humor no one else sees in a particular situation. The humor may turn hostile when the student becomes discouraged or frustrated.

As you turn to the next overhead, explain that the next set of characteristics is affective in nature.

Overhead #6

10. These high expectations may result in a student who is judgmental in his/her criticism of others, as well as self. As you might predict, peer and adult relationships may suffer.
11. Because the student is aware of and sensitive to such problems and issues, she/he may feel frustrated and/or isolated from peers who don't have the same level of awareness or sensitivity.
12. The student may feel self-conscious as a result of being "different," which may lead to low self-esteem. The emotional sensitivity may cause the student to feel highly vulnerable.
13. Inner or internal locus of control means that the student is guided in his/her actions by what is meaningful and important to him/her, not by what others think. This may isolate the student from peers or adults in authority. This early independence may lead others to perceive the student as "marching to a different drummer."
14. The main reason for this characteristic is that the student's interests are not synchronous with those of the same-aged peers. The student is actively seeking someone to talk with about his/her interests.

Before continuing, point out that the characteristics just discussed are relevant for gifted and talented students overall.

Next, you will be considering 10 characteristics that often apply to minority and/or disadvantaged students who are academically gifted and talented. Caution the participants to remember that, while these next 10 characteristics generally hold true for this population of students, they do not necessarily apply to each individual minority and/or disadvantaged student.

Overhead #7

1. The myth persists that students who speak non-standard English are “dumb.” Perhaps the environment has not provided models of standard English. It is our job to see that the student acquires standard English in addition to the language of his/her culture.
2. We need to provide activities that capitalize on these learning styles. Present material in a visual format or have students “show what they know” in a visual. Create activities that call for movement such as simulations, or allow students to do presentations that incorporate movement.
3. Given a stimulating environment with learning tasks that invite motivation, these students can learn very quickly.
4. These students had to be resourceful to be noticed. When survival is on the line, our creativity and adaptability are our strongest allies. Gifted and talented minority or disadvantaged students are often noticed for their ingenious methods of problem solving.
5. As a group, these students tend to score an average of 15-20 points below the traditional gifted and talented students. Remember, however, that there are stunning individual examples of high scores.
6. Non-verbal, non-timed tests such as the Ravens Progressive Matrices may be used successfully with this population.

#7 continued

7. These students are often very aware of how they are perceived. They can “read” people, their attitudes and motivations. They may feel a sense of obligation to their cultural community.
8. These characteristics are the same for the traditional gifted and talented students.
9. The oral tradition is strong in the culture. (Metaphorical language is part of the oral tradition, making oration and stories more colorful.) Since this is valued in the culture, gifted and talented students would be likely to excel. Remember that sense of humor is one of the best ways of identifying the traditional gifted and talented, and this holds true for minority/disadvantaged students as well.
10. To retain their identity and individuality, these students need to be able to function well in both cultures. It is our responsibility to help them build the bridge.

Overhead #8

To conclude the discussion of characteristics, ask the participants to consider the conditions that may negatively affect the referral and identification of minority and disadvantaged students for gifted and talented programs.

Our stereotypes about each condition may lead us to assume that none of these students are gifted and talented. We must examine our stereotypes to understand how they can create blinders for us when identifying gifted and talented students. There are gifted and talented students with one or more of these conditions who may need remediation in one area (e.g., language) but who exhibit gifted and talented behaviors in others (e.g., math, science).

Now let’s watch and listen to a video that will help us understand a little more about recognizing the gifted and talented student.

IV. Videotape

Have the videotape set up and ready to play. Tell participants to jot down any questions they have during the tape. After the tape, ask for the participants' questions and discuss answers with the group. You do not have to answer all of the questions yourself; you can solicit answers from other participants.

V. Debriefing on activity

Whenever an activity is used, it is important to have a debriefing. This ensures that participants reach valid conclusions—the whole purpose of the activity.

**Overheads
#9-11**

Poll several pairs of participants for their ratings and their reasons on each case study. Refer to the overheads as the participants respond.

**Overheads
#12-13**

Then reveal “the answer” to each case study.

At the conclusion of the session, direct participants' attention to the remainder of their handouts on giftedness. They may read these on their own time.

Before participants leave, ask them to complete the Feedback Form in their packet.

OVERHEADS

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Regulation 43-220, Gifted and Talented

(Amended June, 2004)

Section II. B. 6. b. (3)

Provide training/guidance regarding the characteristics of academic giftedness for teachers and other district staff involved in the identification process.

Approved by the South Carolina
General Assembly in June of 2004.

General Characteristics of Gifted & Talented Students

<u>Cognitive Characteristics</u>	<u>Possible Classroom Behaviors</u>
1. Learns rapidly & easily; retains extraordinary quantity of information <u>when interested</u>	Easily bored; impatient with others; exhibits off task behavior
2. High level of verbal ability	Dominates discussions with extra information and questions deemed negative by teachers and fellow students
3. May be lopsided intellectually	Exceptional abilities and interest in one subject area, with only average or below average performance in others

(Characteristics)

(Classroom Behaviors)

4. Average to poor in ...

- Arithmetic computations

Rejects or omits detail; considers linear tasks boring; makes numerous “careless errors” in homework assignments or lengthy tests

- Spelling

May have attempted writing words before seeing them in print

- Handwriting

May have pursued writing before fine motor skills developed

5. Capable of deep concentration and persistence when interested

Refuses to attend to assignments that are perceived as uninteresting or as unimportant “busy work”

(Characteristics)

(Classroom Behaviors)

6. Above average reasoning ability

Questions others' logic—including the teacher's; frustrated with others' lack of understanding

7. Varied interests and curiosity

Asks lots of questions, often not related to current topic; has difficulty staying focused on current task

8. Creative; playful; imaginative; original

May “zone-off” into imaginary world; ideas may be considered wild or silly; may be perceived as off task when asking “But what if...”

Both Cognitive and Affective Characteristics

9. Sense of humor

May be gentle or hostile; “class clown”; makes puns and sees the humor in abstract situations

Affective Characteristics

Possible Classroom Behaviors

- | | |
|--|--|
| 10. High expectations of self and others | Perceived as highly critical; becomes discouraged from high levels of self-criticism |
| 11. Sensitive to world problems, moral issues | Lack of understanding from peer group |
| 12. Heightened self-awareness and emotional depth | Feeling “different” or isolated; moody |
| 13. Early development of an inner locus of control | Difficulty conforming; rejection of external evaluation |
| 14. Seeks intellectual peers | “Teacher’s shadow” at recess; enjoys older students and adults |

Characteristics Often Attributed to Gifted and Talented Minority and/or Disadvantaged Students

1. Use non-standard English with standard English as a second language
2. Prefer visual and kinesthetic learning styles
3. Learn quickly with experience
4. Solve problems in resourceful and ingenious ways
5. Do not perform well on standardized measures
6. Perform better on non-verbal measures
7. Possess social intelligence with a feeling of responsibility for community
8. Exhibit alertness and curiosity
9. Perform better orally than in writing, using humor and metaphorical language
10. Demonstrate the ability to bridge two cultures successfully

**Conditions Negatively Affecting
the Referral and Identification of
Minority and/or Disadvantaged Students
for Gifted and Talented Programs**

1. Low socioeconomic status
2. Minority group membership
3. Non-standard English
4. Limited competency in English
5. Emphasis on remediation

Stereotypes based on 1-5 above

Case Studies

Directions: Read the case studies carefully. Based on your professional judgment and experience, answer the following question for each case:

“How likely is the individual to be gifted and talented?”

Circle the number that best matches your response.

(1=extremely likely to be gifted; 5=not at all likely to be gifted)

CASE #1: 1 2 3 4 5

Mary, age 14, an orphan, was willed to the custody of her grandmother by her late mother. (Mary’s mother was separated from alcoholic husband, now also deceased.) Her mother rejected the homely child who was known to lie and to steal sweets. Mary swallowed a penny at age five to attract attention. Her father was fond of the child. Mary fantasized about living as the mistress of her father’s household for years. Mary’s grandmother, who is widowed, cannot manage the girl’s four young uncles and aunts living in the household. Grandmother resolves to be stricter with granddaughter since she fears she has failed with her children. Dresses granddaughter oddly and puts her in braces to keep back straight. Refuses to let her have playmates. Did not send her to grade school. At 15, Mary is sent to a boarding school in England where, mentored by the headmistress, she exhibits academic achievement and leadership skills.

CASE #2: 1 2 3 4 5

William, a junior in high school, is a popular athlete who has already been approached by a number of colleges offering basketball scholarships. His life goal is to make a personal contribution to society. William is an excellent student, enrolling in many honors classes while maintaining a GPA of 3.8. He plays first string on the school basketball team and holds offices in several school organizations. His hobbies include chess, reading, and swimming.

CASE #3: 1 2 3 4 5

Victoria is an African American student in the fourth grade at a small rural school. One parent finished high school and the other completed grade eight. Both work—the father holding two jobs to provide the necessities for Victoria and her three siblings. The family home is a small two-bedroom bungalow. Victoria is very articulate. Her facial expressions, word choice (though not always appropriate in a school setting), and gestures hold the attention of others when she tells stories or sings the songs she has created out of her imagination. Her performance in the classroom is lackluster at best. Her homework is often missing or incomplete, as is her classwork. Victoria’s teacher is impatient with her performance and behavior in the classroom. Victoria has requested information on Shakespeare and a copy of his play, *Romeo and Juliet*.

CASE #4: 1 2 3 4 5

Sam, a high school senior, has obtained a certificate from his physician stating that a nervous breakdown makes it necessary for him to leave school for six months. He is not a good student and has no friends. Sam's teachers find him to be a problem. As a child, he spoke late and adjusted poorly at school. His father is ashamed of his son's lack of athletic ability. Sam has odd mannerisms, makes up own religion, and chants hymns to himself—his parents regard him as “different.” He often walks about oblivious to weather conditions. His academic aptitude is way above average, but his performance in school ranges from low average to below average—except in math, his primary interest.

CASE #5: 1 2 3 4 5

Thomas is a clean-cut seventh grader with a sunny disposition. In the classroom he sometimes has difficulty focusing on the assigned tasks. He tends to lose his homework and classwork in the black hole of his desk or book bag. His school performance tends to be erratic—sometimes great, sometimes not. Transition from one subject to the next poses a problem for him. There is a gap between his potential and his achievement. His teachers seem to like him, but they constantly have to remind him to finish his work and hand it in. Thomas enjoys working on complex math problems and is usually the first one in his class to solve the “problem of the week.”

Debriefing

CASE #1: This is Eleanor Roosevelt. Remember—giftedness is a dynamic quality that can only be enhanced by learning experiences that challenge and extend the person’s ability, talent, and/or interest. Placed in the challenging, yet supportive environment of the boarding school, Eleanor’s gifted behaviors emerged.

CASE #2: This is Bill Bradley—Rhodes scholar, professional basketball player for the New York Knicks, and former U.S. senator. He was the type of student easily recognized as gifted—one who exhibits many of the characteristics. (He is running for the Democratic nomination for President.)

CASE #3: This is the same Victoria you saw briefly on the tape. She would not have been identified as gifted and talented based on standardized aptitude and achievement scores. Using alternative measures that tapped her strengths—oral and written communication and creativity—and placing her in a challenging and supportive environment, she exhibits gifted and talented behaviors.

CASE #4: Sam is actually Albert Einstein. His giftedness was not obvious until adulthood. He created his own challenging environment to extend his mathematical ability.

CASE #5: Thomas represents a composite of several underachieving gifted students. He may have a mild learning disability in writing (dysgraphia) and/or he may have an attention deficit disorder. (Notice the disorganization and distractibility.) Thomas is gifted mathematically.

Case 4 and Case 5 are lopsided, not gifted and talented in all areas. Only Case 2 is easily identified. All other cases have problem areas that may mask their giftedness. We as teachers, must look beyond the problem behaviors to identify students' strengths and talent areas.

HANDOUTS

- ◆ **Case Studies (2 pages)**
- ◆ **General Characteristics of Gifted and Talented Students (2 pages)**
- ◆ **Minority and/or Disadvantaged Students (1 page)**
- ◆ **Questions to Ask (2 pages)**
- ◆ **Teacher Checklist (1 page)**
- ◆ **Basic References for Gifted Education (1 page)**
- ◆ **Feedback Form (1 page)**

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General Characteristics of Gifted & Talented Students

Cognitive Characteristics

1. Learns rapidly & easily; retains extraordinary quantity of information when interested
2. High level of verbal ability
3. May be lopsided intellectually
4. Average to poor in
 - Arithmetic computations
 - Spelling
 - Handwriting
5. Capable of deep concentration and persistence when interested.
6. Above average reasoning ability
7. Varied interests and curiosity
8. Creative; playful, imaginative; original

Possible Classroom Behaviors

- Easily bored; impatient with others; exhibits off task behavior
- Dominates discussions with extra information and questions deemed negative by teachers and fellow students
- Exceptional abilities and interest in one subject area, with only average or below average performance in others
- Rejects or omits detail; considers linear tasks boring; makes numerous “careless errors” in homework assignments or lengthy tests
- May have attempted writing words before seeing them in print
- May have pursued writing before fine motor skills developed
- Refuses to attend to assignments that are perceived as uninteresting or as unimportant “busy work”
- Questions others’ logic—including the teacher’s; frustrated with others’ lack of understanding
- Asks lots of questions, often not related to current topic; has difficulty staying focused on current task
- May “zone-off” into imaginary world; ideas may be considered wild or silly; may be perceived as off task when asking “But what if...”

(General Characteristics of Gifted & Talented Students – continued)

**Both Cognitive and Affective
Characteristics**

9. Sense of humor

Possible Classroom Behaviors

May be gentle or hostile; “class clown”; makes puns and sees the humor in abstract situations

Affective Characteristics

10. High expectations of self and others

Perceived as highly critical; becomes discouraged from high levels of self-criticism

11. Sensitive to world problems, moral issues

Lack of understanding from peer group

12. Heightened self-awareness and emotional depth

Feeling “different” or isolated; moody

13. Early development of an inner locus of control

Difficulty conforming; rejection of external evaluation

14. Seeks intellectual peers

“Teacher’s shadow” at recess; enjoys older students and adults

**Characteristics Often Attributed to
Gifted and Talented
Minority and/or Disadvantaged Students**

1. Use non-standard English, with standard English as a second language
2. Prefer visual and kinesthetic learning styles
3. Learn quickly with experience
4. Solve problems in resourceful and ingenious ways
5. Do not perform well on standardized measures
6. Perform better on non-verbal measures
7. Possess social intelligence with a feeling of responsibility for community
8. Exhibit alertness and curiosity
9. Perform better orally than in writing, using humor and metaphorical language
10. Demonstrate the ability to bridge two cultures successfully

**Conditions Negatively Affecting
the Referral and Identification of
Minority and/or Disadvantaged Students
for Gifted and Talented Programs**

1. Low socioeconomic status
2. Minority group membership
3. Non-standard English
4. Limited competency in English
5. Emphasis on remediation

Stereotypes based on 1-5 above

(Adapted from *Growing Up Gifted*, by Barbara Clark)

Questions To Ask

Does the student

- Ask a lot of questions?
- Show a lot of interest in progress?
- Have lots of information on many things?
- Want to know why or how something is so?
- Become unusually upset at injustices?
- Seem interested and concerned about social or political problems?
- Often have a better reason than you do for not doing what you want done?
- Refuse to drill on spelling, math facts, flash cards, or handwriting?
- Become impatient if work is not “perfect”?
- Seem to be a loner?
- Seem bored and often have nothing to do?
- Complete only part of an assignment or project and then take off in a new direction?
- Stick to a subject long after the class has gone on to other things?
- Seem restless, out of seat often?
- Daydream?
- Seem to understand easily?
- Like solving puzzles and problems?
- Love metaphors and abstract ideas?
- Have his or her own idea about how something should be done? And stay with it?
- Talk a lot?
- Love debating issues?

This student may be showing giftedness cognitively.

(Adapted from *Growing Up Gifted*, by Barbara Clark)

Does the student

- Show unusual ability in some area? Maybe reading or math?
- Show fascination with one field of interest? And manage to include this interest in all discussion topics?
- Enjoy meeting or talking with experts in this field?
- Get math answers correct, but find it difficult to tell you how?
- Enjoy graphing everything? Seem obsessed with probabilities?
- Invent new obscure systems and codes?

This student may be showing giftedness academically.

Does the student

- Try to do things in different, unusual, imaginative ways?
- Have a really zany sense of humor?
- Enjoy new routines or spontaneous activities?
- Love variety and novelty?
- Create problems with no apparent solutions? And enjoy asking you to solve them?
- Love controversial and unusual questions?
- Have a vivid imagination?
- Seem never to proceed sequentially?

This student may be showing giftedness creatively.

Teacher Checklist

Characteristics of the Gifted and Talented

	Rarely	Occasionally	Often	Most of the Time
a. Learns rapidly and easily.	_____	_____	_____	_____
b. Thinks clearly, recognizes implied relationships, comprehends meanings.	_____	_____	_____	_____
c. Reads above grade level.	_____	_____	_____	_____
d. Retains what she/he has heard or read without appearing to need much rote or drill.	_____	_____	_____	_____
e. Has large vocabulary.	_____	_____	_____	_____
f. Is independent, individualistic, self-sufficient.	_____	_____	_____	_____
g. Is curious, investigative.	_____	_____	_____	_____
h. Asks penetrating, searching questions.	_____	_____	_____	_____
i. Has long attention span.	_____	_____	_____	_____
j. Produces original products or ideas.	_____	_____	_____	_____
k. Prefers complex ideas.	_____	_____	_____	_____

(Adapted from *A Guide Toward Better Teaching of the Gifted*, by Ruth Martinson)

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Feedback Form

Gifted Students: Who Are They?

1. What did you learn from this presentation that you didn't already know?

2. On what specific gifted/talented topic would you like more information?